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New York

President:	Mr. Ikouebe	(Congo)
Members:	Argentina	Mr. Mayoral
	China	Mr. Zhang Yishan
	Denmark	Mr. Faaborg-Andersen
	France	Mr. De La Sablière
	Ghana	Mr. Christian
	Greece	Mr. Vassilakis
	Japan	Mr. Oshima
	Peru	Mr. De Rivero
	Qatar	Sheikha Almayasa bint Hamad Al-Thani
	Russian Federation	Mr. Churkin
	Slovakia	Mr. Burian
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Sir Emyr Jones Parry
	United Republic of Tanzania	Mr. Mahiga
	United States of America	Ms. Wolcott Sanders

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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06-36046 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 3.15 p.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

The President (*spoke in French*): In accordance with the understanding reached in the Council's prior consultations, I shall take it that the Security Council agrees to extend an invitation under rule 39 of its provisional rules of procedure to Mr. Ibrahim Gambari, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs.

It is so decided.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda. The Security Council is meeting in accordance with the understanding reached in its prior consultations.

At this meeting, the Security Council will hear a briefing by Mr. Ibrahim Gambari, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, to whom I give the floor.

Mr. Gambari: Once again, the Middle East is at an important juncture. However, rather than one intersection, we now have several. While the issues may not be strictly intertwined, each influences the other in ways that are difficult to predict. In the Israeli-Palestinian theatre, Hamas' takeover of the Palestinian Authority, interfactional tensions in Gaza and the new Israeli Government have produced a new set of challenges as well as opportunities for the international community, including, unfortunately, a serious humanitarian situation in the occupied Palestinian territories. Furthermore, the situation between Syria and Lebanon remains of continuing concern, and while the national dialogue in Lebanon continues, bilateral and domestic tensions remain. Meanwhile, the situations in Iran and Iraq, while not the domain of this briefing, also impact peace and stability across the Middle East.

Let me start with the situation in Israel and Palestine before turning to Lebanon and then making some more general observations.

I turn first to the fiscal and humanitarian situation in the occupied Palestinian territory, where official salaries have not been paid to some 155,000 public-sector workers since the end of February. Those salaries account for 25 per cent of the Palestinian economy, supporting about one million people. Recipients provide the bulk of health, education and other services, including security, to the Palestinian people. Longer-term projections point to dramatic rises in poverty and unemployment rates if current trends continue.

On 9 May, the Quartet held discussions on those and other issues here at United Nations Headquarters, and benefited from the contributions of the Foreign Ministers of Egypt, Jordan and Saudi Arabia as regional partners. The meeting highlighted the regional impact of the current crisis and resulted in the Quartet's expressing serious concern about the deteriorating conditions.

First, the Quartet stressed that international efforts to assist the Palestinian people do not relieve the Palestinian Authority Government of its responsibilities, outlined in signed agreements. The Palestinian Authority Government has received the important message from the donor members of the Quartet that its commitment to the principles outlined by the Quartet in its meeting in London on 30 January would pave the way for the restoration of direct assistance.

Secondly, the Quartet expressed its willingness to endorse a temporary international mechanism, to be developed by the European Union, that is limited in scope and duration, operates with full transparency and accountability, and ensures the direct delivery of assistance to the Palestinian people. If those criteria can be met, the temporary international mechanism will begin operating as soon as possible and will be reviewed after three months.

In the unique circumstances of the occupied Palestinian territory, it is difficult to differentiate between the roles of the different actors who are responsible for addressing basic needs. The Secretary-General therefore hopes that the scope of the mechanism will be as broad and as non-discriminatory as possible. The United Nations is lending its full support to European efforts to establish the mechanism and is participating in discussions in Brussels today — discussions which will focus on the need to move quickly, to ensure flexibility and to address the crisis in the banking sector.

Thirdly, the Quartet urged Israel to take steps to improve the humanitarian situation of the Palestinian

people. Israel has responsibilities in the occupied Palestinian territory, as well as obligations outlined in previous agreements.

The largest portion of the shortfall in the Palestinian Authority's monthly budget is the Palestinian value added tax and customs duties, which Israel has not transferred for the third month in a row. We note the positive decision of the Israeli cabinet on 21 May to spend approximately $11 million of that money on the health sector, further to Prime Minister Olmert's pledge to address humanitarian concerns, and notably health issues, in the occupied Palestinian territory. The Government of Israel is encouraged to build on that step and to find a way to transfer the full balance of monthly value added tax and customs receipts. That money accounts for about one third of the budget of the Palestinian Authority, and its early transfer is vital.

Fourthly, the Quartet called for urgent responses to assistance requests by international organizations, especially United Nations agencies. A revised consolidated appeal addressing additional humanitarian needs of Palestinians under the new circumstances will be issued later this month, and donors are also called upon to support the ongoing emergency activities of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East.

I now turn to the security situation. Five Israelis were injured by Palestinian violence this month. No Israelis have been killed, although one Israeli and one American teenager died of wounds sustained in last month's suicide attack in Tel Aviv. A reported 45 Palestinians have been killed this month, including at least two children, and 180 Palestinians have been injured. Of the Palestinian casualties, 10 of the dead and at least 33 of the wounded were victims of intra-Palestinian fighting, as was one Jordanian Government employee who was killed in Gaza a few days ago. This internal strife, notably in Gaza, has now reached worrying proportions.

We recently reported on appointments by President Abbas to key security positions, including within the Ministry of Interior, and the subsequent announcement by the Government of a new security force controlled by the Ministry of Interior. Despite President Abbas's declaration that this move was illegal, Interior Minister Siam deployed 3,000 armed men in Gaza on 17 May. The President responded by ordering all police forces to reinforce deployment in the Gaza Strip, and there were clashes between Palestinian Authority police and the new Hamas-led security force. A few days later, the Chief of Intelligence, Tareq Abu Rajab, was seriously injured in an explosion. Incidents continue, including the killing a few hours ago of the head of preventive security, Nabil Hodhod, in central Gaza. The situation remains extremely volatile. We welcome and encourage Egypt's ongoing efforts to calm the tension. We also invite others with influence to engage in similar efforts.

Jordan has announced that its security services discovered a hidden cache of long-range Katyusha rockets for use by Hamas against senior Jordanian officials. President Abbas has expressed great concern about these allegations, which Hamas officials have denied. On 26 April, two members of the European Border Assistance Mission were lightly wounded in an attack by Palestinian militants at Rafah. This attack was condemned by President Abbas' office and by the Ministry of Interior.

The Government of Israel reported that 81 attacks had been perpetrated against its territory. At least 40 of those attacks reportedly involved rocket and mortar fire from Gaza. No injuries were reported, though facilities were damaged. Israel responded with shelling of the rocket launching grounds. It remains essential for the Palestinian Authority to heed the Quartet's call to act decisively against terrorism and bring an end to the violence.

A senior Hamas military commander allegedly responsible for numerous attacks against Israeli civilians was arrested yesterday by Israeli security forces in the West Bank. Among other operations this month, Israel killed five alleged militants in Gaza on 5 May and seven on 14 May in the northern West Bank, and on 20 May a leading member of Islamic Jihad in Gaza was also killed. In this last attack, a boy, his mother and his grandmother were killed, and a three-year-old was wounded. Such collateral damage underlines the need for Israel to cease targeted killings and heed the call of the Quartet to show restraint and consider the potential consequences of its actions on civilians. Earlier today, according to news reports, two Palestinians were killed and dozens wounded in gun battles between Israel Defense Forces (IDF) soldiers and Palestinians in central Ramallah, which erupted after troops entered the city to arrest alleged militants.

On closures, barrier and settlement activity, I would like to say that the Quartet has urged both parties to take concrete steps to implement their obligations under the Agreement on Movement and Access. The Karni crossing between Israel and Gaza has been closed for half of the scheduled days of operation in 2006. The United Nations and other actors face increasingly tight Israeli restrictions on staff movement to and from Gaza and on the supply of humanitarian goods through Karni, despite Israel's stated desire to support expanded United Nations operations.

The Israeli authorities directly responsible have shown awareness of the difficulties. Karni has been open to allow sufficient imports to avert a food supply crisis this month. However, agricultural exports have been limited, resulting in losses of about $9.5 million since the beginning of the season. We were encouraged by the 17 May decision of the new Israeli Defence Minister, Mr. Peretz, to reopen Karni in both directions. Regrettably, the implementation of this decision was suspended shortly thereafter. We hope that this will be reconsidered.

According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), physical obstacles in the West Bank currently stand at 515, up from 476 last month. A system of permits heavily restricts travel to the Jordan Valley. It also restricts access to closed areas between the Green Line and the barrier and limits movement between different segments of the West Bank.

The Quartet also stated on 9 May that the parties should avoid unilateral measures which prejudice final-status issues and expressed concern about settlement expansion and the route of the barrier. However, on 26 April, Prime Minister Olmert announced his intention to increase the pace of construction and to complete the barrier around Jerusalem by the end of the year. The Israeli cabinet reiterated its commitment to the construction of the barrier and approved a series of changes in the northern West Bank and Jerusalem areas. Meanwhile, Israeli settlement construction continues. The Defence Ministry recently authorized the expansion of four West Bank settlements to the north and south of Jerusalem as well as in the Jordan Valley. Defence Minister Peretz also extended previously issued evacuation orders regarding 12 settlement outposts, while declaring the Government's intention to take action on "the evacuation of illegal outposts".

Turning to political developments, I would like to observe that, on 9 May, the Quartet welcomed President Abbas's continued commitment to a platform of peace, which was reaffirmed in a letter to the Quartet prior to the meeting. The Quartet also reiterated its grave concern that the Palestinian Authority Government has so far failed to commit itself to the principles of non-violence, recognition of Israel and acceptance of previous agreements and obligations.

A Palestinian national dialogue will start tomorrow in Ramallah and Gaza City, linked by video. Around 500 representatives of all political parties, civil society, the private sector, the Palestinian Authority and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) will participate. The agenda includes measures to reinforce national unity, ways to address the current critical situation, and the activation of the PLO. The Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process has encouraged the pursuit through dialogue of a positive consensus among Palestinian political actors regarding the road ahead.

In an important precursor to the dialogue, Palestinian political detainees in Israeli prisons, including senior Fatah and Hamas members, announced on 10 May an agreement on common principles for national action and dialogue. The agreement refers to establishing a Palestinian State along the 4 June 1967 borders, describes the PLO as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people, states that political action should be based on Arab legitimacy and United Nations resolutions, and declares that resistance to Israel's occupation should be limited to the 1967 borders. That document was endorsed by President Abbas. The Hamas-led Palestinian Authority Government's response was more cautious.

On the Israeli side, Prime Minister Olmert presented his governing coalition to the Knesset on 4 May. The coalition guidelines state that the Government of Israel "will strive to shape the permanent borders of the State of Israel" and that it

> "will act to achieve this through negotiations and agreement with the Palestinians, conducted on the basis of mutual recognition, signed agreements,

the road map principles, cessation of violence and the disarming of the terror organizations".

The Quartet welcomed Prime Minister Olmert's call for negotiations with a Palestinian partner committed to the principles of the road map. In this context, the meeting between President Abbas and Israeli Foreign Minister Livni at the World Economic Forum in Sharm el-Sheikh last weekend was a positive development, as was the agreement reached to prepare carefully for a meeting between the President and Prime Minister Olmert.

As many members will have read, Prime Minister Olmert met President Bush in Washington yesterday. While Prime Minister Olmert indicated that he intends to "exhaust every possibility to promote peace with the Palestinians", he also noted that if Israel concluded that progress was not possible, it would be "compelled to try a different route", involving removing settlements which are not part of major Israeli settlement centres in the West Bank while ensuring that major population centres would "remain under Israeli control and become part of the State of Israel as part of the final-status agreement".

President Bush encouraged Prime Minister Olmert to reach out to President Abbas and stated that the best servant of peace was "a negotiated final-status agreement". President Bush also indicated that any final-status agreement could be achieved only on the basis of "mutually agreed changes". We support the need for a negotiated outcome and in that regard urge all parties to engage in substantive dialogue at the earliest opportunity.

With regard to Lebanon, the situation along the Blue Line has been quiet but tense. There were 20 Israeli air violations, as compared with three last month. We continue to call on all parties to respect fully the Blue Line. The Secretary-General's Personal Representative for Lebanon has reminded all his interlocutors of the need to take the necessary measures to lower tensions.

On 2 May, Lebanon called for the removal of a number of sand barriers and border police posts that Syria had established in the vicinity of the Lebanese towns of Ras Baalbeck and Aarsal, apparently to stem smugglers operating in the area. Following bilateral discussions, work has begun on the removal of a number of these posts. This episode shows that progress can be achieved on the basis of direct bilateral consultations between Lebanon and Syria, and also reinforces the need for the delineation of the two countries' borders.

On 17 May, units of the Lebanese army clashed in the western Bekaa valley with members of an armed Palestinian faction based outside the refugee camps. According to reports, one Lebanese soldier and one Palestinian gunman were wounded. A Lebanese soldier was also briefly held by the Palestinian group. This incident highlights the importance of implementing the decision taken in the national dialogue to disarm within six months all Palestinian factions situated outside the camps.

Within Lebanon, the sixth and seventh rounds of the national dialogue took place on 28 April and 16 May, respectively. The question of the presidency was discussed in both rounds, although there has been no conclusion. Participants therefore put aside the issue of the presidency and began a discussion on Hizbollah's weapons and the development of a national defence strategy. This will be taken up when the dialogue next convenes, on 8 June. We welcome and encourage the stated intention of Lebanese leaders to continue the national dialogue, which is the most effective way to address the critical issues facing the country, and we welcome the support of Lebanon's neighbours for this important initiative.

Mr. Roed-Larsen has reported to the Council separately on the implementation of Security Council resolution 1559 (2004), and the Council recently adopted resolution 1680 (2006) dealing with the need for further action by the relevant parties. In addition, members will be aware that the United Nations International Independent Investigation Commission's Serge Brammertz will be presenting his interim report to the Council in early June.

The example set by the Lebanese through their national dialogue is a good one, and the coming dialogue in Palestine could be another example of constructive engagement by the stakeholders in addressing critical issues. The parties in Palestine need to make every effort to avoid a further deterioration of the situation. National dialogue is an opportunity to reassert the goals and institutions shared by all Palestinians and to agree on ways to pursue a negotiated two-State solution to the conflict along the lines defined by the road map. We sincerely hope that

the dialogue will become a channel for communication and for conciliation.

We also reiterate the central importance of negotiations for the future of the political process between Israel and the Palestinians. Unilateral moves simply cannot resolve issues such as the border between the State of Israel and a future Palestinian State, which must be mutually agreed. After all, we are talking here of the borders of two States, not one. Any changes to the 1967 lines can be set only through negotiated agreement. In that regard, we welcome last weekend's meeting and the intention of both parties to work together on these very critical and difficult issues. A two-State solution can be achieved only through negotiations, and its achievement will be an important element of ensuring sustainable peace and security in this region, to which all of us within and outside of the Council, including the United Nations and the international community at large, are committed.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank Mr. Gambari for his briefing.

The Security Council has thus concluded the present stage of its consideration of the item on its agenda.

In accordance with the understanding reached in the Council's prior consultations, I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion of the subject.

The meeting rose at 3.35 p.m.